

Testimony of Sara LeMaster, MPAP
Manager of Government Relations and Public Policy
Community Health Center Association of Connecticut
SB 284

Distinguished leadership of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Sara LeMaster and I am the manager of government relations and public policy for the Community Health Center Association of Connecticut. I am submitting this testimony on SB 284 AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS.

The Community Health Center Association of Connecticut is Connecticut's primary care association, which supports the work of 16 of Connecticut's health centers. Connecticut's health centers collectively serve over 380,000 residents every year, and specialize in providing care for traditionally underserved communities. Health centers do not turn people away based on their ability to pay for services, and patients have access to same-day medical, dental, and behavioral health services. Twenty percent of health center patients identify as Black, and 48% identify as Hispanic or Latino. A majority (58%) receive Medicaid benefits¹.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our health centers have been working diligently to protect our communities and support our public health infrastructure. Health centers have provided over 930,000 COVID tests and fully vaccinated over 386,000 residents since August of 2020², all while continuing to provide care for the most vulnerable.

Connecticut's health centers serve residents in every legislative district. Health centers operate over 100 locations throughout Connecticut and employ over 4,000 people³ and have an estimated economic impact of over \$800 million⁴.

Senate Bill 284 will expand HUSKY coverage to all children regardless of immigration status who otherwise meet the current HUSKY eligibility criteria. Expanding eligibility will equalize access to health care coverage and help reduce the uninsured rate in Connecticut.

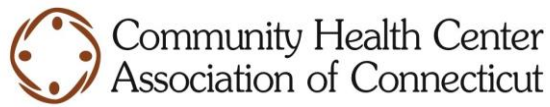
Connecticut's health centers serve over 70,000 patients every year who are uninsured, and over 100,000 children. Federally qualified health centers and emergency rooms are the only places where people without health insurance can receive healthcare. This model is not sustainable for patients or the healthcare system, and this bill is an important step in ensuring that fewer Connecticut residents go without healthcare coverage. Health centers treat many patients who are uninsured or underinsured, and are familiar with the barriers to access for those without health insurance.

¹ 2021 UDS data

² <https://www.nachc.org/research-and-data/covid-19-vaccine-testing-data-by-state/>

³ 2021 UDS data

⁴ <https://www.nachc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Economic-Impact-Infographic-2.pdf>



People who are undocumented need the same level of care as everyone, and it is unreasonable to assume that the only care undocumented people will ever need will be from either a federally qualified health center or a hospital emergency room. Patients who use Connecticut's health centers often need the care of a specialist or other medical providers outside of the scope of what health centers can offer. This bill will enhance access to quality healthcare, reduce the overall cost of healthcare in Connecticut, and address health disparities experienced by the most vulnerable.

CHCACT supports this bill and the intent of the legislature, and strongly encourages that this policy be further developed to include all undocumented immigrants in Connecticut. Thank you for raising this bill and giving me the opportunity to testify.